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SUBJECT: Media Reaction: Cross-Strait Relations

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage November 22-24 on the cabinet's policy of issuing consumption vouchers; on the probe into former President Chen Shui-bian's alleged corruption; and on the economic predicament of the world and of Taiwan. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" satirized the Ma Ying-jeou Administration for having taken several self-disparaging measures to please China but only receiving China's continued suppression of Taiwan's international status in return. An editorial in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" said that now is the time for the issue regarding Taiwan's international participation to be put on the table. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" criticized that the meeting between Taiwan's special envoy to APEC summit, Lien Chan, and Chinese President Hu Jintao on the margins of the summit was nothing more than symbolic for both Taiwan and China. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" urged the Ma Administration to stop appeasing China and forge consensus with Taiwan's political opposition on cross-Strait policy. In contrast to the pro-independence newspapers' criticism, the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" gave credit to the Lima meeting between Lien and Hu. End summary.

A) "The So-Called 'Chinese Goodwill' Is Only the Ma Administration's Lie to Deceive Itself as Well as Others"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (11/24):

"Lien Chan, who once served as [Taiwan's] Vice President, was allowed to attend the APEC [summit] and was the highest-level envoy in history to represent our country's leader [at the summit]. Therefore, the Ma Ying-jeou Administration bragged about [this development] as China's show of goodwill and a significant breakthrough in [the Administration's] cross-Strait policy. However, the meeting between Lien and [Chinese President] Hu [Jintao], with Lien called by 'Chairman Lien' and Hu called 'General Secretary Hu,' fell to the level of a meeting between the KMT and the Chinese Communist Party. Or it was only catching up between old friends, not even a meeting at all. Especially when Lien mentioned the issue of Taiwan's participation in international organizations, Hu turned a deaf ear and evaded the important issues for the easy one. These all made the Ma Administration's so-called breakthrough [in cross-Strait relations] and [China's show of] goodwill become a lie which deceives [the Ma Administration] as well as others. ...

"The Ma Administration thought that by fawning on China as much as possible, including self-disparaging sovereignty, recognizing the fictitious 1992 consensus, implementing the diplomatic truce by which [Taiwan] surrenders without fighting, and undertaking the tactic of procrastinating on the arms procurement [from the United States], China will respond with goodwill and give Taiwan international space for [Taiwan's] survival. However, judging from the evidence of several developments recently, the Chinese goodwill that President Ma was self-congratulatory about was only [Ma's] self-intoxication. No matter who holds the reins of the [Taiwan]

government, China does not loosen its hand when it suppresses Taiwan. ..."

B) "It's Time to Put the Issue Regarding [Taiwan's] International Space Should Be Put on the Table"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (11/22):

"... Several incidents that happened lately indicated that the cross-strait relations in the wake of the meeting between [Straits Exchange Foundation Chairman] P.K. Chiang and [China's Association for Relations across the Taiwan Strait Chairman] Chen Yunlin have embarked on a new round of the feeling-out process. ... First, following the four agreements signed between Chiang and Chen, the differences and barriers between both sides of the Taiwan Strait in terms of policies on non-political issues, such as direct transportation, tourism and business have been resolved one by one. The issue regarding Taiwan's participation in the international organizations has been put on the table eventually right now. Given the current state of the cross-strait relations, now is perhaps the real beginning of the test [for both sides].

"Second, it will be overly optimistic to say now that the Ma Administration's pragmatic cross-strait policy has pushed the other side of the Taiwan Strait to adopt a more flexible and pragmatic approach towards Taiwan's future participation in the international organizations and activities, or even, we can say everything is still up in the air now. In addition, even though as of now there is absolutely no sign showing that Beijing will possibly adopt a more flexible approach towards Taiwan's participation in international organizations and activities, it is at least evident that Beijing is no longer interested in using any drastic means to

sabotage the atmosphere across the Taiwan Strait. Voices inside Beijing also admitted that this is an issue that needs to be resolved and that it should be done by initiating dialogue between both sides. Should these messages really indicate that both sides are deliberating about a new phase of dialogue, the development will be welcomed by all. ... But as what is said previously, now both sides are just beginning to touch on the sensitive areas of cross-strait issues, which will naturally have repercussions on the nerves of both sides. ..."

C) "More Hot Air than Substance in Lima"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (11/24):

"Former vice president Lien Chan met Chinese President Hu Jintao at the APEC leaders' summit in Lima on Friday. APEC is one of a handful of international bodies of which Taiwan is an official member and this was the first time such senior Taiwanese and Chinese leaders met at one of its summits. The meeting was symbolic for both sides, but nothing more than that. Although the meeting was an indication of reduced cross-strait tension, Taiwan should not rush to celebrate. In no way does it mean that China is willing to recognize Taiwan's sovereignty, or that Taiwan can now deal with China on an equal footing internationally. Beijing's leadership saw the meeting as one between friends that had nothing to do with Taiwan's international status. ...

"Although US President George W. Bush is a lame duck leader, he is still the head of a great power. Diplomacy therefore required that he hold a bilateral meeting with Hu. The two did not depart from the standpoints they have held at past meetings. ... No great practical results were to be expected from Hu's meetings with either Lien or Bush, but his meeting with Bush was a dialog between equals, while that with Lien was an exercise in control through conciliation. Although the Lima summit was the first at which Taiwan has been represented by such a senior figure as a former vice president, and although he managed to meet the Chinese president, this shows only that China is taking a more flexible approach in its dealings with Taiwan. It does not signify any change in Beijing's 'one China' policy. Taiwan should not allow the APEC meeting to lull it into a false sense of security."

D) "Consensus Needed on PRC Policy"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (11/24):

"Over the past decade, Taiwan's cross-strait policy toward the People's Republic of China has gone from a stance of 'no haste, be patient' initiated by former president Lee Teng-hui through 'effective management and active openness' enunciated by ex-president Chen Shui-bian to the 'relentless opening with wishful thinking' adopted by President Ma Ying-jeou and his restored Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government. On the surface, the past seven months of KMT government have featured the resumption of bilateral dialogue and intensive interaction between Taipei and Beijing, but the underlying reality is that Taiwan's sovereignty has been undermined by a series of unnecessary political concessions made by the Ma government for the sake of forging a superficially peaceful but dangerously unequal relationship with Beijing. ...

"Last weekend's meeting between PRC State Chairman Hu Jintao and Taiwan leader representative and KMT honorary chairman Lien Chan alongside of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum leaders' summit in Lima, Peru illustrated the perils of such unbalanced cross-strait relations. ... More substantively, Ma's hopes that his acceptance of the so-called 'Consensus of 1992' and its 'one China' principle and signing agreements on direct links during the visit by PRC envoy Chen Yunlin earlier this month would lead Beijing to return the KMT government some favors, such as allowing Taiwan World Health Assembly status, have also been dashed.

"Instead, the image projected by the PRC spinners in the APEC summit is that the two sides have moved toward Beijing's 'one China' formula as symbolized by the warm hand-shaking between Lien and Hu at a prominent global forum. All Ma has achieved through his blind rush for rapprochement with Beijing has been the dramatic reduction of Taiwan's own stock of bargaining chips without gaining any clear and certain concessions from the PRC. Even worse, neither has Ma engaged in any hedging of his cross-strait campaign if the touted drive toward cross-strait detente falters, thus leaving Taiwan's fragile relations with its diplomatic allies vulnerable to a disastrous domino effect if Beijing fails to abide by Ma's unilateral 'diplomatic truce.' ...

"Instead of blindly rushing down the road to Taiwan's perdition, the Ma administration should renounce its failed policy of appeasement, end the secret KMT-CCP forum's control over cross-strait talks and

initiate a consultative process with Taiwan's political opposition, civil society and public for a national consensus on a China policy that can safeguard and not mortgage Taiwan's national interests."

E) "APEC Summit Bodes Well for Cross-Strait Ties"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (11/22):

"... For Taiwan, the Lima summit marks a milestone in the evolving cross-strait relations. It also promises economic and political opportunities for both Taiwan and the mainland. Lien Chan, a former vice president of the Republic of China and honorary chairman of the ruling Kuomintang, is representing President Ma Ying-jeou to the meeting. Never before since 1993, when former U.S. President Bill Clinton hosted the first leaders' meeting in Seattle, has Taiwan been able to send such a high-caliber envoy to the meeting. ...

"The fact that Lien Chan is acceptable to Beijing symbolizes a cross-strait detente which he helped usher in. In 2005, Lien, then chairman of the KMT who lost the 2004 presidential election to Chen Shui-bian under suspicious circumstances, made a 'journey of peace' to Beijing as the guest of his Chinese communist counterpart Hu Jintao. The historic Lien-Hu meet broke the ice and started a thaw. Ma Ying-jeou's triumph in the March election, largely on a platform of engagement with Beijing instead of confrontation, has accelerated the thaw, as manifested in the resumption of dialogue and the first visit to Taiwan early this month by China's envoy Chen Yunlin of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait to sign four economic accords with his counterpart P. K. Chiang of the Strait Exchange Foundation. ...

"It requires great wisdom for both of them to seize the opportunity to advance cross-strait relations which are so vital to the interests of both. Taiwan's economic future depends heavily on mainland China, the largest source of the island's trade surplus. This year, Taiwan's economy could tumble to a growth rate of 1.87 per cent, the lowest in seven years, according to official estimates. Closer economic ties with the mainland, a locomotive for global economy, are the best way for Taiwan to weather the economic downturn. For Beijing, peace and stability across the Strait is vital to its continued economic growth and its pursuit of a 'harmonious society.' There is common ground for seeking closer and better ties despite ideological differences. A win-win situation is possible and worth pursuing. Lima is a touchstone."

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